

**Western Montana Planning Zone
Analysis of the Management Situation
Draft Version 1**

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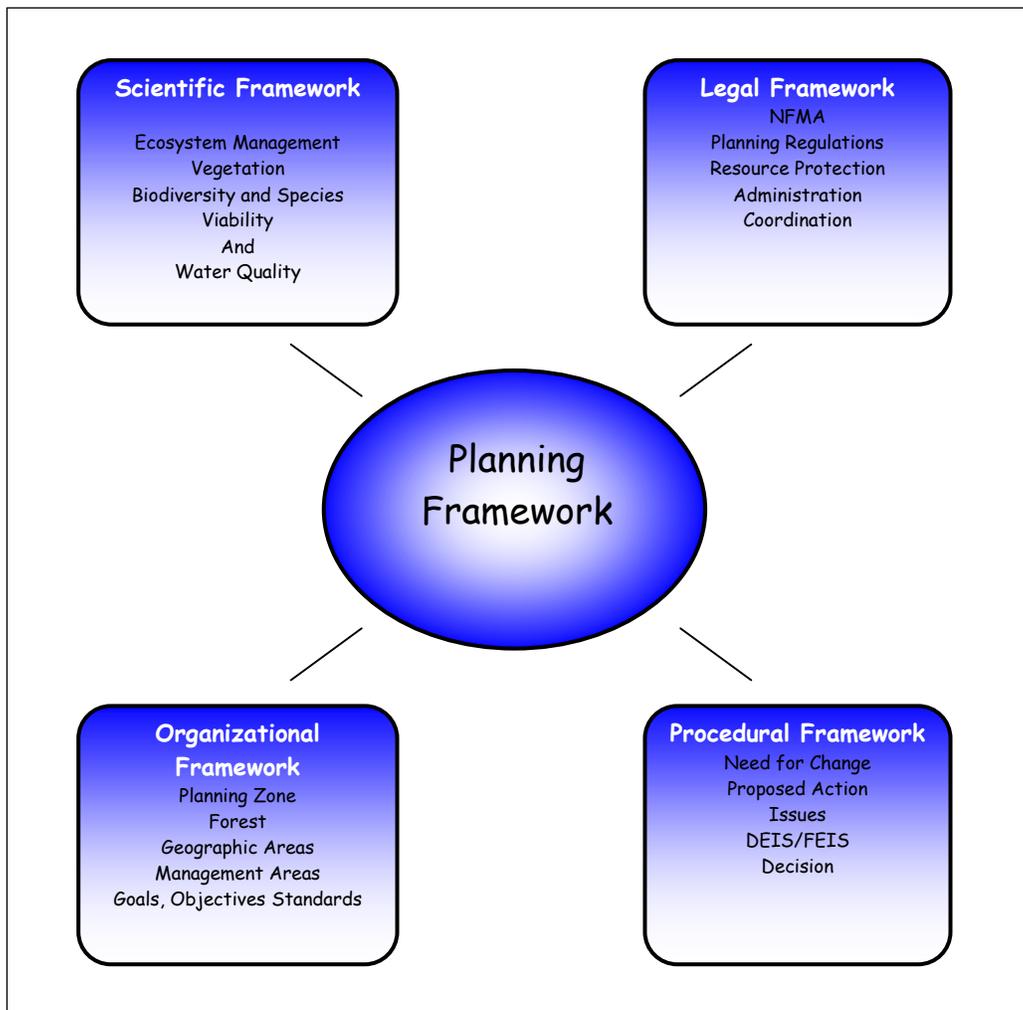
Chapter 3 – Planning Framework

Introduction

In this Chapter we lay out our overall framework for Forest Plan revision, in terms of what we consider to be the major components and how these relate to one another.

The planning framework that will guide forest plan revision consists of 4 components: the *Scientific* framework, the *Legal* framework, the *Organizational* framework, and the *Procedural* framework. Figure 2 illustrates the relationship of these components to the planning process. They are described in more detail below.

Figure 1: Components of the Planning Framework.



Scientific Framework: Ecosystem Management

One of the primary forces affecting forest plan revision is the increasing emphasis on ecosystem management. In 1997, an interdisciplinary Committee of Scientists was convened to review and evaluate the Forest Service's planning process for land and resource management and to identify changes that might be needed in the planning regulations (USDA 1999). As a result of this committee's work, an emphasis was placed on sustainability. As noted in their report: *...for the past 100 years, we, as a nation, have been attempting to define what we mean by "sustainability," in part through our grand experiment in public forest ownership. In the process, we have broadened our focus from that of sustaining commodity outputs to that of sustaining ecological processes and a wide variety of goods, services, conditions, and values.*

Ecosystem management has been defined by a number of authors (Agee and Johnson 1987, Overbay 1992, Christensen et al 1996, Forest Ecosystem Management Assessment Team 1993). Put simply it is to consider social, economic, and ecological principles in managing ecosystems to restore or sustain ecological integrity, and to provide for the values, products, uses, and services for the long term. Ecosystem management tends to accommodate, facilitate, and even encourage processes (i.e. fire) that ecosystems evolved under, which provides for long-term sustainability.

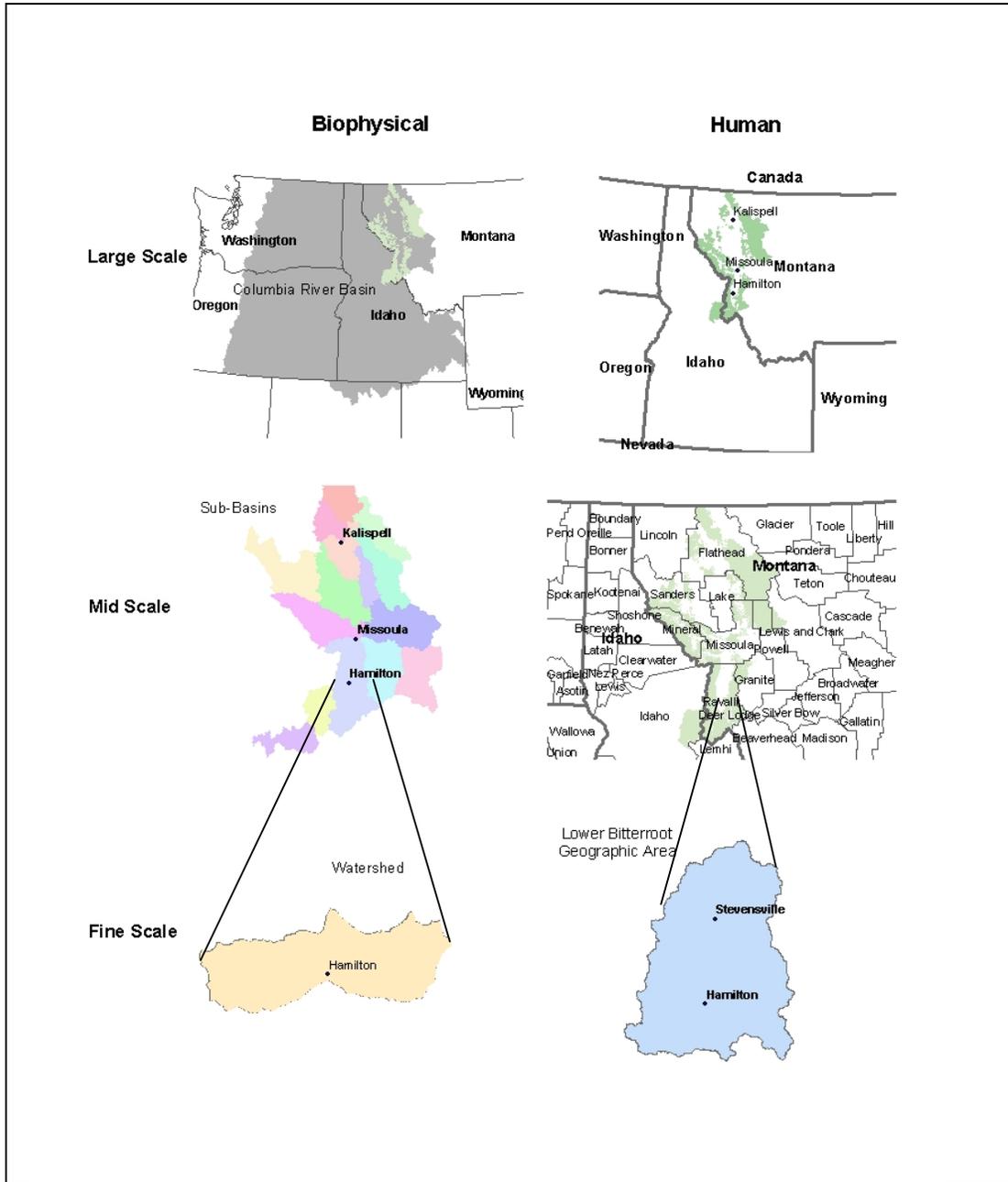
Christensen and others (1996) assert that ecosystem management is driven by explicit goals, executed by policies, protocols, and practices, and made adaptable by monitoring and research based on our best understanding of the ecological interactions and processes necessary to sustain ecosystem structure and function. Forest plan revision will incorporate these attributes as defined below.

1. **Long Term Sustainability:** Sustainability over the long term means to satisfy social, economic, and ecological needs for present and future generations. Social sustainability is the ability to maintain social capital (i.e. investments, services, etc.) that maintains the basic framework of society, and economic sustainability means maintaining capital (Goodland 2002), providing ample opportunities to satisfy preferences and helping to promote and retain vital and diverse communities in our regional economies. Ecological sustainability is the ability of a system to maintain or restore its composition, structure and function over time. This concept of sustainability will form the foundation of the new forest plans in the form of desired future conditions, goals, objectives, and standards.
2. **Clear Operational Goals:** Goals must be explicitly defined in terms of desired future conditions for all ecosystem components necessary for sustainability.
3. **Sound Ecological Models and Understanding:** Science-based models describe how ecosystems function through space and time. Forest plan revision will be based on monitoring and research that help describe ecosystem characteristics and function. Ultimately, our understanding of ecosystem function will help ensure sustainability over the long term.
4. **Understanding of Complexity and Interconnectedness:** Forest plan revision will fully recognize the extreme complexity of the ecosystems we manage. Biological diversity (the diversity of life and its processes) and the complexity of ecosystems are critical to sustainability. The more complex and diverse an ecosystem is the more

- likely it can resist, recover, and be resilient when disturbance such as fire, wind and flood occur. The importance of ecosystem complexity and the vast array of interconnections that underlie ecosystem function is certainly one of the most important lessons learned from decades of research and resource management. The revised forest plans will recognize the complex nature of ecosystems, and result in management approaches that are responsive to a need to increase complexity, and that can be modified as our understanding evolves.
5. **Recognition of the Dynamic Character of Ecosystems:** Ecosystems are dynamic and they change continuously. The revised forest plans will acknowledge natural and human disturbance processes (e.g. fire, flood, wind, avalanche, succession, timber harvest, road building, etc.) and consider them in desired future conditions and management actions and strategies.
 6. **Attention to Context and Scale:** Social, economic, and ecological processes occur over a wide variety of scales in space and time. There is no single spatial scale or time scale appropriate for management of ecosystems. For any issue, the revised forest plans would "zoom in and zoom out" and consider the social, economic, and ecological interrelationships. In addition, the revised forest plans would incorporate the many and complex relationships the Forest has with individuals, communities, businesses, and governments (Federal, State, Counties, etc.) and how they use the lands within and around the Forest (Figure 3).
 7. **Acknowledgement of Humans and Ecosystem Components:** People are an integral part of ecosystems. Human population growth is a critical element to consider in terms of ecological sustainability and management opportunities. Forest Plan revision will consider the social and economic aspects of ecosystems. To a large degree, what happens in the socio-economic sphere of interaction determines the types and intensities of impacts that humans will have on ecosystems; and therefore, on the ability of the ecosystem to sustain itself.
 8. **Commitment to Adaptability and Accountability:** Our knowledge of ecosystems is incomplete and subject to change with on going research and monitoring. Success in achieving management goals, objectives, and standards must be monitored by comparing expectations to measured results. We must be able to adapt to the unique features or needs of a particular area and to inevitable change through space and time. As new information becomes available, we must be able to adapt accordingly. To be adaptable and accountable, management objectives and expectations should be based on the latest science and monitoring information. A critical part of forest plan revision will be the development of monitoring programs that are designed to provide accessible and timely feedback to managers, so that appropriate adjustments in management can be made. In pursuit of sustainability for forest plan revision, we must first describe where are we now, how are we doing, and where are we going. We then need to identify the critical components of social, economic, and ecological systems and then attempt to gather the appropriate information over time to help answer those questions. Monitoring information is then used to help make the decision on whether or not we are on the right course or if corrections (amendments) are needed in order to meet management goals. A simplified illustration of the adaptive management model is shown in Figure 4.

As seen in Figure 3 below, large social scales may include states or regions, while large biophysical areas may include major river basins or mountain ranges. Mid-scale social scales may include counties, cities, or rural areas, and mid-scale biophysical areas may include sub-basins or eco-regions. At the finer scale, geographic areas can describe a general “sense of place” like the lower Bitterroot Valley or the Ninemile Valley. Finer-scale biophysical areas may include watersheds, sub-watersheds, or forest types.

Figure 2: Examples of biophysical and human scales.



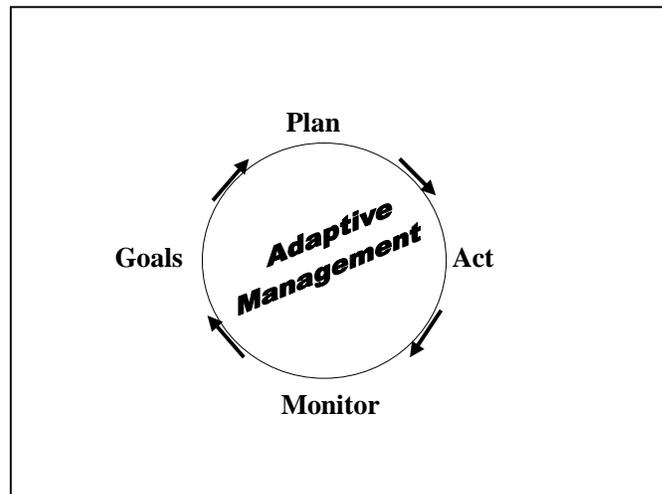
Recent science has emphasized that sustainability of resource outputs is dependent on the long-term sustainability of whole ecosystems. One of the main distinctions of ecosystem management is that it concentrates on overall ecosystem health and productivity through an understanding of how different parts of the ecosystem function with each other, rather than on achieving a set of outputs (USDA 1996).

Using the ecosystem management concepts described above, the revised forest plans will:

1. Focus management direction at the appropriate scale, depending on the resource or issue, and will integrate management among resources and issues.
2. Emphasize sustaining whole ecosystems over the long term
3. Encourage collaboration with governments and the general public in establishing goals and developing desired future conditions.
4. Recognize (and emphasize in the appropriate cases) the human component of ecosystems, especially in developing desired future conditions and management direction.

While ecosystem management has important differences from how we have managed national forest lands in the past, as noted above we are still managing under the Multiple-Use, Sustained-Yield Act (MUSY, 1960). We have, however, placed a much greater emphasis on sustaining ecological processes while providing a wide variety of goods, services, conditions, and values; rather than focusing primarily on sustaining commodity outputs.

Figure 3: Adaptive Management Model.



Throughout the forest plan revision process; ecosystem management principles will be incorporated. These principles will ensure that our management approach is sustainable over time, and that our legal obligations are fully met.

Legal Framework

The *National Forest Management Act* of 1976 (NFMA) directed that forest plans be prepared for each National Forest, and that those plans be revised every 10 to 15 years. The regulations needed to give the detailed guidance necessary for implementing NFMA were adopted in 1979 and substantially amended in 1982. The 1982 regulations are still being used today.

In 1989, the Forest Service conducted a comprehensive review of the planning process and concluded that the agency spent too much time and money on planning. New regulations were proposed in 1995 but were never finalized. Another proposed rule was published in October 1999 and formally adopted in November 2000.

In response to a number of lawsuits and concerns, the Forest Service initiated a review of the 2000 rule and concluded that there were enough serious concerns regarding implementation of the rule that a directive was issued allowing continued use of the 1982 regulations for forest plan revision. The Forest Service is now proposing changes to the 2000 planning rule to address issues and concerns raised in earlier reviews. The public comment period on the proposed rule ended on April 7, 2003 and a Final Rule is expected soon. Should the revised planning rule be adopted in the near future, it is possible that this planning effort will be completed under the new rule.

Not all agency direction regarding planning is in the regulations. The Forest Service Manual (FSM) contains legal authorities, objectives, policies, responsibilities, instructions, and guidance needed on a continuing basis by Forest Service line officers and primary staff. The Handbook (FSH) is the principal source of specialized guidance and instruction for carrying out the direction issued in the FSM. Examples include Handbooks on land management planning and environmental analysis. Most day-to-day operational questions are more appropriately addressed at the Manual and Handbook level, rather than in the regulations.

In addition to the National Forest Management Act, there are many other laws and regulations that guide our Plan revision process; most of them fall in one or more of the following categories:

- Biological and physical resource protection (such as endangered species, water quality, or air quality).
- Cultural and historic resource protection (such as structures, places, or trails).
- Procedural Requirements (such as consultation with other agencies, Native American Tribes, compliance with the information and documentation requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act, or compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act).

Organizational Framework

We are using the term *Organizational Framework* to mean the organization of the plans themselves. In the next section, *Procedural Framework*, we will talk about the steps involved in doing the revisions to arrive at our final product of new Forest Plans.

The organizational framework of our revised plans will include many of the same basic components of a strategic plan used by other large organizations, such as a business, an educational institution, or another government agency. Here are the basic components, followed by discussion of what they mean and how they relate to one another.

- Zone
- Forest
- Geographic Area
- Management Areas (and Prescriptions)
- Goals
- Objectives
- Standards
- Monitoring Elements

Zone:

The Western Montana Planning Zone (WMPZ) is an affiliation of the Bitterroot, Flathead, and Lolo National Forests, solely for the purposes of coordination and efficiency in revising our respective Forest Plans. While there may be some decisions made that are the same across the entire Zone, even those would appear as identical but separate decisions made in each of the three individual Forest Plans.

Forest:

This is the basic planning unit; each Forest will have its own individual Forest Plan, supported by its own formal Record of Decision. However, we will be alert for situations where consistent, or even identical, strategic direction might properly apply to all three Forests. We will be especially attentive to assuring compatibility in direction across Forest boundaries, both within our planning zone and between our zone and adjacent Forests.

Geographic Areas:

We have divided the Planning Zone into seventeen Geographic Areas (GAs). We are using the GAs to organize our public involvement activities in such a way that people who live, or have a special interest in, a given area can focus greater attention on that area, rather than being asked to consider an entire Forest when they are giving us planning input. In drawing the GA boundaries, we tried to represent rather large areas within which people tend to have some commonality in terms of how they relate to the National Forest – where they live, where they recreate, where they are most likely to take interest in a new Forest Service project and perhaps, where they are more likely to participate in public forest planning discussions.

Management Areas:

We give the name *Management Area* (MA) to a specific area of land within a Geographic Area, for which we have identified a set of desired future conditions and a prescribed range of management tools for achieving those conditions. We have a standard set of basic Management Area descriptions, each of which may be applied in many different locations with possible slight variations to fit localized conditions. In some respects, Management Areas are rough counterparts of zoning designations used in urban land use planning.

Goals and Objectives:

Once we have decided what long-term outcomes to achieve, we establish goals and objectives as stepping-stones toward those ultimate future conditions. A goal is a broad accomplishment, such as “to restore all streams in the Big River watershed to a “zero degradation” condition, by the year 2015”. An objective is a specific, measurable and time-limited accomplishment that will move us toward achieving a particular goal.

Desired Future Conditions:

Desired Future Conditions (DFC) are used to specify the future forest landscape conditions we wish to achieve in a given geographic area, and are based on a combination of public preferences, our own management expertise, and knowledge of the landscape’s biological and physical capabilities.

Standards:

“*Standards*” are specific instructions as to what we can and can’t do in particular situations. They may reflect laws or regulations which we have little or no authority to change, policies established at the National and Regional level, or direction determined at the Forest level. There are Forest-wide standards that apply in all situations of a certain kind, and management area-specific standards that apply only when the situation occurs in a particular management area.

Monitoring Elements:

A critical part of Forest Plan implementation is observing whether or not what we planned to happen actually is happening and if it is not, taking the necessary corrective (or “adaptive”) action. In order to do this, we must specify certain *Monitoring Elements* that can be measured and reported on a regular basis. These are sometimes the same elements addressed by standards (distances, acres, etc.), but they may take other forms as well. The important thing is that they are measurable and that they accurately reflect whatever it is we are trying to monitor.

Procedural Framework

The preceding section talked about major components of the revised Plans; this section talks about the process we will follow for revising the Plans.

Need for change:

We begin by determining:

- Which parts of the existing Forest Plans are working well and should be continued under the revised Plans,
- Which parts need relatively minor changes that are not controversial enough to warrant considering alternative ways of dealing with them, and
- Which parts need major revision and will probably require us to choose from among several alternative ways of dealing with them. We refer to the latter as “major revision topics”.

Proposed Action:

Working from the need for change identified by our own employees, and by members of the public, we will publish a Proposed Action in which we indicate the general direction that the Forest Service is leaning, with regard to each of the major revision topics. In some cases, all three Forests in the Zone may have the same “leaning”, while in others, each Forest may be taking a different preferred position. The main reason for announcing a Proposed Action is to provide a somewhat specific proposal for members of the public (and other land management agencies) to respond to when we ask for their input.

Issues:

From what we initially perceive as our need for change and what we learn through engagement with the public and other agencies, we will identify a final set of *Issues* that will drive the revision process. Each issue will be expressed as a fairly specific statement of what “the problem” is, and what decisions the Forest Supervisors will eventually have to make to “solve” that problem. In some cases a single major revision topic will embrace several Issues.

Alternatives:

At this stage we will work with the public, other agencies, and our own employees to develop a range of different approaches we might take to managing each of the three Forests in the zone. These *Alternatives* will be our best attempt to incorporate numerous and often differing perspectives into a range of possible management approaches, each of which would be intended to meet all of our scientific and legal forest management obligations but would represent a different mix of tradeoffs among different tools and methods for meeting those obligations.

Effects Assessment:

In order to fully understand the consequences of implementing each of the Alternatives, we will do an *Effects Assessment*. This assessment will reveal the bio-physical, economic and social consequences of each Alternative, with major emphasis on points that are directly relevant to the decisions Forest Supervisors will have to make, as identified in the Issue Statements.

Documentation:

In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, all of the above steps will be documented in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The Draft EIS will describe the process we have followed, report the findings of our Effects Assessment, and identify the Alternative that the Forest Service is leaning toward adopting at that time. This Preferred Alternative will give the public a basis for deciding what they do and don't like, and for suggesting changes. Publication of the DEIS will be followed by an intensive period of dialogue with the public and other agencies and governments.

Response to the Draft EIS will almost certainly lead to changes in some or all of the Alternatives, and quite possibly even a different choice of Preferred Alternative. Once all the necessary changes and additional effects assessment have been completed, the Forest Supervisors will consider this new information, as well as a large body of other local and national public input, consult with Forest and Regional Office staff, and make a final selection of alternative to become the Revised Forest Plan. Any additional alternatives and effects assessment will be reported in the Final EIS. Each Supervisor's final Revised Forest Plan decision and supporting reasoning will be documented in the Record of Decision (ROD), publication of which will be concurrent with publication of the Final EIS.

How All the Pieces Fit Together

While it is important to have the public, other agencies, and our own employees understand how all the major components of the plan revision process work together, it is most important of all that members of the plan revision team have a clear and common understanding. The following numbered phrases are an attempt to provide that understanding, as simply as possible.

1. Initial meetings with our own employees, accumulated comments from staff files and personal memories, and page-by-page review of the current Forest Plans and Monitoring Reports reveal what appears to be Need for Change.
2. Through dialogue among team members, and with the three-Forest leadership team (FLT), we arrive at what seem to be the Major Revision Topics. Other topics that are not expected to generate alternatives are also noted for revision.
3. Early public involvement, plus further dialogue with our own leadership team, helps us determine the style and content of the Proposed Action.

4. An important part of our public involvement will be at the community, or place-based level. We will use Geographic Areas as a basis for deciding how to focus our outreach activities and whom we should try to get involved. For public involvement purposes, the Geographic Areas will also be our basic mapping, data tabulation unit.
5. Review of the Proposed Action by members of the public, other agencies, and FS employees helps us determine (1) whether our major revision topics were in fact the right ones, and (2) exactly what issues we will need to respond to when developing Alternatives.
6. Issues are commonly defined as “unresolved conflicts”; so that Alternatives then become differing packages of resolutions for those “conflicts”. In order to clarify exactly what kinds of decisions will have to be made in order to resolve the Issues, they are translated into “planning questions”, which will have to be answered by each Alternative, and by the Forest Supervisors when they decide which Alternative to select.
7. The Alternatives will attempt to answer the planning questions in the following manner:
 - a. For each Geographic Area, we will use a combination of our own expertise and the preferences, and local knowledge of people who live there, or who otherwise have a substantial interest in what happens there, to arrive at a description of the Desired Future Conditions across that landscape.
 - b. Again, through a combination of public involvement and our own Forest Service expertise, we will identify various combinations of Management Areas, which if applied on that landscape would be capable of moving toward the Desired Future Conditions. Each such combination of MAs would be the beginnings of a different Alternative.
 - c. Each Management Area would consist of:
 - i. An overall characterizing Theme (e.g. Wilderness, Wildland-Urban Interface).
 - ii. A description of the future conditions likely to occur if that particular management approach were to be followed.
 - iii. Activities that would be permitted, and prohibited.
 - iv. Management Standards.
 - v. Monitoring Items that logically and scientifically are a good match with these Standards and Activities.
 - d. The key to starting to build Alternatives would be to match the theme and probable future conditions associated with different Management Areas with the Desired Future Conditions of each Geographic Area. We would expect that in most cases, different parts of the same Geographic Area would have different Desired Future Conditions and therefore, different MAs.

8. At this point we can consider the Desired Future Conditions in each Geographic Area as equivalent to the management Goals for that area. As we select different combinations of Management Areas for reaching those Goals (i.e. different Alternatives), we are implicitly identifying different combinations of Objectives, accomplishment of which would lead us to those Goals.
9. The Principles of Ecosystem Management, our Scientific Framework, would guide our selection of different combinations of MAs for accomplishing the Goals of a Geographic Area.
10. Our Legal Framework would, in part, define the space within which our Alternatives (different packages of Management Areas) would be reasonably implementable.
11. Once completed and subjected to public and internal review and revision, the Alternatives are subjected to Effects Assessment and the remaining NEPA process of DEIS, review, revision, FEIS and Decision.
12. Following are some important questions that remain to be answered:
 - a. Exactly how and where will we integrate other forms of public input, beside that gained through the process described above?
 - b. How will we aggregate/integrate information based on individual Geographic Areas into Forest-wide Alternatives? Forest-wide Goals? Standards?
 - c. How and when/where will we differentiate between individual Forests in the Proposed Action? Alternatives? Effects? Decision?